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West Germans now believe KGB inspired attack on Pope

By Michael Knipe

Western intelligence experts, particularly the West Germans, are now convinced there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that the Soviet KGB, or one of its client organizations in Eastern Europe, had a hand in the attempted assassination of the Pope.

So far the intelligence agencies have not produced any conclusive evidence from their intensive study of all the material gathered after Mehmet Ali Agca, a Turkish gunman, shot the Pope on May 13 in St. Peter's Square.

The West Germans, however, are now supporting the theory, put forward by Vatican intelligence and the Italian security services, that Agca was not a fanatical lone wolf but part of a carefully conceived plot probably originating in Eastern Europe. It is conceivable that a killing could have been organized at a level well below the top Soviet leadership.

After Agca's trial there was a strong feeling of dissatisfaction in the Vatican at the absence of any evidence during the trial indicating where the real motive for the attack on the Pope lay. There was considerable impatience that the Italian police had failed to throw any light on Agca's activities preceding the assassination attempt.

Among the many court documents not presented publicly at Agca's short trial was a letter written by Mr Pierre Salinger, once press secretary to President Kennedy and now with ABC Television in Paris.

Mr Salinger, cooperating with Italian police in submitting ABC photographs that suggested Agca had an accomplice, wrote a note saying: "CIA sources say that the Soviets are using a faction of the PLFP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) to train Turks. These have killed the Israeli Consul in Ankara in 1972. They planned an attack on the Israeli Embassy in Ankara in 1973. A Red Army deserter has reported that plans were made to kill the Pope by a splinter group of the PLFP of Wadi Haddad which is KGB controlled."

"The camp was also attended by Turks masquerading as Islamic fundamentalists."

There was an added note to the effect that the CIA was getting reports from Italy according to which the Italian

authorities believed the attack was KGB-directed.

The Vatican authorities were certainly convinced that the KGB had organized the attempted assassination by indirect means. The Soviet agency was believed to have infiltrated a faction of the Turkish secret police. This faction had seen the usefulness of Agca as a hired killer; after he had shot Adbi Ipecki, editor of *Milleyet*, in 1979, and was responsible for organizing his escape from Kartal Maltepe maximum security five months after his conviction. Nobody had escaped from there for ten years. Agca then lived lavishly while travelling extensively through East and West Europe for 18 months.

In a television documentary on the possible KGB links in the shooting transmitted on Thursday, Thames Television's *TV Eye* programme interviewed Signor Francesco Mazzola, the Italian junior minister in charge of the security forces at the time of the shooting.

Indicating the KGB's motives he noted that Lech Walesa, the Polish Solidarity leader, had just been received by the Pope and the Pope had shown on previous occasions not only his concern for Solidarity but his desire to protect it.

Signor Francesco D'Andrea, a leading Italian journalist, told Julian Manyon, the *TV Eye* reporter, that the Vatican was convinced that a conspiracy had been organized by the Eastern block because of the Pope's Polish origins.

The Pope, he recalled, was about to announce his intention to return to Poland to administer the last rites to Cardinal

Wyszynski. There were grounds for believing that because of the tense political situation in Poland the visit would inevitably have generated an overwhelming series of anti-Communist demonstrations.

On his travels Agca stayed a long time in Bulgaria. He was there for 60 days on a forged passport. He stayed at the best hotels. At the Vitosha, known to Western intelligence as a haunt of Turkish arms dealers, he met Omer Mersan who, Agca says, was involved in smuggling. He said it was Mersan who helped him get a new passport and introduced him to a mysterious Bulgarian called Mustafa Eof who some Italian officials believe may have played a part in setting up the attack on the Pope.

Agca next turned up in West Germany where he was questioned by police and released. Three days after the murder of a Turkish leader of the Grey Wolf terrorist group Agca arrived in Tunis where he met Eof in the Hotel du Lac.

According to Agca the Bulgarian asked him to murder the Maltese Prime Minister Mr Dom Mintoff. "The Italians do not believe that, but they regard the meeting as significant. After the meeting with Eof Agca began frantic travelling in Europe leading to his arrival in Rome."

Signor Francesco Mazzola, who was involved in the Italian investigation into the assassination attempt, believes that Mustafa Eof was Agca's contact with the Bulgarian secret service and that from time to time he supplied Agca with money, documentation and instructions.

However, inquiries were continuing, he said.

Signor Mazzola is convinced that during the time Agca was preparing for the attack, his movements were never decided by himself but were prompted and instructed by someone else.

The most specific evidence supporting a conspiracy theory was a photograph taken moments after the assassination attempt of a second man with a gun.

The Italian Government does not publicly back the KGB connexion. A senior interior ministry official said last night that there was no concrete evidence to suggest that the Turk was connected with the secret service of any country.



Mehmet Agca: Mysterious meeting with Bulgarian.